

Christiansted Lutheran Church
(Dutch Reformed Church)
4 King Street
Christiansted
St. Croix
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-23

HABS

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CHRISTIANSTED LUTHERAN CHURCH
(Dutch Reformed Church)

HABS No. VI-23

Location: 4 King Street, Christiansted, St. Croix,
Virgin Islands.

Significance: Built as the Dutch Reformed Church prior to 1740
and reconsecrated as the Christiansted Lutheran
Church in 1834, the exterior of the building
retains much of its original Dutch Renaissance
appearance, though the tower was added in the
early 1830's.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Prior to 1740.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in good condition and is well-maintained. Some of the interior woodwork is slightly infested with termites, though their spread appears to have been arrested and limited to finishes.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: A one-story church, cruciform in plan, with a three-tiered tower on the northwest side, and with a L-shaped sacristy projecting from the south corner of the southwest side. The main body of the building is 7 bays long and three bays wide.
2. Foundations: The foundations are rubble masonry, stuccoed and painted. They project out from the main walls, so as to form a plinth measuring 3'4" to 5'0" above ground level.
3. Wall Construction: The walls are rubble masonry with brick lining of door and window openings and of corners, except for the tower which is constructed in brick. The walls are painted yellow with white trim, cornice, etc.
4. Porches: The porches on the northeast and southwest side of the church are one bay square. They have an arched opening in their

exterior walls. The floor level is the same as the top of the plinth that forms the foundations. Masonry staircases with limestone tile treads lead up to their fronts. The side walls of the staircase are curved and swing outward. They terminate in a cylindrical newel-post. There are no rails and the masonry stringer extends only 4" above the masonry of the steps. The lower section of the arched openings of the porches is filled with a balustrade of the same design as those in the nave window openings. The lower tier of the tower is identical to that of the side porches, except for the addition of wrought iron rails set in the top of the side walls of the stair.

A four-step brick stoop provides access to the exterior sacristy door.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is centered in the northwest gable under the tower. Two side entrances are located in the center bays of the long sides of the building. The sacristy can be entered either directly from the church through the last bay in the southwest wall or from the churchyard through a door in the southeast wall of the sacristy. Except for the exterior sacristy door opening which has an elliptical arch, all door openings have semi-circular arches. On the exterior each door has a slightly projected surround with a capital band at the springing line and a decorative keystone. The openings are splayed towards the interior.

The doors are all double and of a double-board construction, which are nailed and clenched together with vertical boards on the exterior and with diagonal boards on the interior. The light between the door head and the arch is filled with a fixed jalousie.

- b. Windows and shutters: Window openings in the main body of the church and in the tower have semicircular arches. Windows in the sacristy have elliptical arches. A circular window with stained glass is centered in the southeast gable. All windows have surrounds with capital bands at the springing line and have decorative keystones. The sill of the window opening in the nave of the church is 9" above the floor level. On the exterior the lower sections of the opening is filled with a balustrade formed by six turned balusters and a heavy moulded top rail. On the interior the balustrade is backed by two-panelled double shutters that close against the top and bottom rail of the

balustrade. The surrounds terminate in moulded bases resting on a plinth.

Except for the tower openings and the circular gable window, all windows have exterior shutters of the same construction as the doors with interior double, single-panelled, moveable jalousies. The space between the arch and the window head has fixed louvres.

The tower openings have fixed louvres only.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The church has a gable roof with corrugated metal roofing on sheathing supported on wood rafters. The eaves extend only slightly beyond the cornice. The tower has a low pyramidal roof projecting only a few feet above the parapet wall of the top tier. The roofing and the construction is the same as in the main roof.
- b. Cornice, bands: The exterior corners of the nave have projecting plaster quoins. The corners of the porches and the sacristy are accentuated by pilasters. On the porch they support an architrave band below the cornice. The cornice is continuous around the building and the porches forming the lowest of the three horizontal bands which run across the gables of the nave. The two narrower upper bands have less projection, and intersect the coping band of the gable at the points where the three double-curves form acute angles. The coping terminates in a finial at the peak of the gable. The gable of the sacristy has the identical treatment. The porches lack the horizontal bands that otherwise have the same detailing of coping and finial.

Applied to the end of the northeast gable are the metal initials "F. R. VI: (Frederick VI, Rex) below a closed crown. The date "1830" is attached to the frieze and centered above the door.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floorplans: The large, rectangular nave occupies the main body of the church, which is accessed by the open porches on the southwest and northeast sides of the building or through the main entrance under the tower on the northwest side of the building. A small scaristy is located outside the nave on the northwest side of the church.

2. Stairways: The U-shaped organ and choir loft runs completely across the northeast end of the nave and extends some 24 feet along the southeast and northeast walls. The main balcony of the loft is supported by four wooden columns, while the flanking arms rest on three columns. The lower half of the columns is square in cross-section, though the upper half is chamfered, and thus terminates with an octagonal capital.

The balcony is reached by two wooden staircases immediately to the left and right of the main entrance. The staircases have pine tread and risers set into the wall on one side and on the other supported by a mahogany stringer. The staircase has an open mahogany railing with a crisscross balustrade. Small closets occupy the spaces below the stairs. The upper tiers of the tower are reached from the balcony by way of three sets of ladders.

3. Flooring: The floors of the porches and of the lower tier of the tower are laid with Gotland limestone tile. In the nave, the flooring is mainly a gray marble tile with some Gotland limestone tile in the north end of the church. Under the pews and the altar, the floor is paved in a yellow brick. The floors in the upper tier of the tower, in the sacristy and on the balcony are pine boarding nailed to floor joists.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plastered and painted white throughout. The ceiling is a segmental barrel vault, covered with furred pine board and stained a mahogany color.
5. Doorways, doors and shutters: Doors, shutters and balustrades are painted white. The jalouies and the fixed louvres above the doors and windows are painted a dark green.
6. Decorative features: The balcony columns, fascia boards, turned spool balustrade and rail are mahogany with a natural finish. The pews, altar and pulpit are of the same material.

The architectural trim is limited to a cover moulding under the balcony, porch and sacristy ceilings and to a cornice under the vaulted nave ceiling. In all cases it is wood that is painted white.

7. Hardware: The hardware is wrought iron. The doors have heavy L hinges, 2 pairs for each door with box locks and two sets of heavy storm hooks. The shutters have 2 pairs of strap hinges for each set of shutters. Two large hooks on sill hold them open while four smaller hooks on the interior keep them closed. A swinging wooden bar on the interior of the shutters locks them

into their closed position. Each set of jalousies and shutters which are hung behind the balustrades, have two pairs of H hinges. The closed governor's pew has brass hinges and a brass box lock.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Lighting: The nave of the church is illuminated by 4 eight-armed, cast iron chandeliers with blown glass shades, fluorescent strip lighting and by cast iron bracket fixtures. The chandeliers are hung in a row from the center line of the barrel vault by rods and chains. The fluorescent lighting strips are attached to the wood ceiling immediately above the cornice. The area below the balcony is lit by three stamped metal candle fixtures with large blown glass shades, hung by chains from the ceiling. All fixtures were originally intended for candles, but have been converted to electricity. The building is completely electrified.

9. Miscellaneous: The church has several memorial plaques in black, gray and white marble set in the floor or the walls. They date from the early 18th century through the mid-19th century. The church also has miscellaneous furnishings such as a heavy brass lectern, 2 mahogany tables, mahogany chairs, 19th-century carved hymnal boards, a marble baptismal fount, etc. The reredos of the altar is a high Baroque design made locally in 1752 from an earlier Danish design. The altar table and rail are of a more recent date. The altar, the baptismal fount and several of the memorial plaques were part of the furnishings of the Steeple Building, the Lutheran Church of Our Lord of Zebaoth.

D. Site:

1. Orientation: The long axis of the church points northwest - southeast. The tower is built against the northwest gable. Arcaded masonry porches, only bay wide, jut out from the centers of the long sides of the building and form the arms of the cruciformed plan. A small masonry L which contains the sacristy one bay wide by one bay long is built against the southwest side of the church at the south corner. The church is free-standing and occupies the south corner lot at the intersection of King Street and Queen Cross Street.

Hedges borders the street sides of the lot. A fence with heavy chains suspended between the plastered brick pillars extends from the west corner of the church to the west lot line parallel

to King Street and divides the yard from the street. A wrought-iron gate provides entry to the yard. The yard has a gravel driveway with a turn-around in front of the southwest porch. A cistern is located between the porch and the sacristy against the wall of the church. A circular ornamental fountain and several markers and plaques in marble and limestone are set against the side of the building north of the porch. The yard is landscaped and has several Royal Palms, mahogany, and flamboyant trees, as well as ornamental scrubs, such as oleander, hibiscus, crotons, etc.

Prepared by: F. C. Gjessing
Resident Architect
Virgin Islands
National Park Service
1959

Edited by: Jack Barker, Jr.
Historian
Historic American Buildings
Survey
June 1984

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

For further information, see the National Register of Historic Places.